

Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation News

*To facilitate, promote, and
educate the public on the way
of teaching and playing the piano
taught at the Talent Education Research
Institute in Matsumoto, Japan by
Dr. Haruko Kataoka*

Piano Basics Foundation News

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A Gift From Parents (Life's Foundation)

By Haruko Kataoka

From the Matsumoto Suzuki Piano Newsletter
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Translated by Chisa Aoki and
Teri Paradero
Edited by Karen Hagberg

I was born in 1927 and before you know it more than 70 years have elapsed. Was I just biding time in vain? As I ponder upon what seems like a blur, I am finding that there are some good things. I am told that students I have nurtured (some since the 1960's, and two who study with me now) will be performing a concert as a present to me.

They were cute little three-, four-, and five-year-olds. And here again, before you know it they have grown into splendid adults who have continued to pursue their study of music and will perform in this concert. Even though they have each embarked on their own different paths, they are six of my students who love piano music so much so that they have continued their studies through thick and thin, through struggles and joys. There are many others who have made music their work. I would like for them to perform at the next opportunity.

The first two performers in the program are seniors in high school. There were many others who wanted to perform but living in Matsumoto, these fortunate two were selected. They are currently my students who love music and study diligently.

The third performer, Yoichiro, started piano when he was four years old. He had a laid-back personality and had a difficult time learning in the beginning. He did not progress and proved to be quite a challenge for his mother. Nevertheless, she practiced arduously with him for three to four hours every day.

While he was in grade school, they practiced reliably in spite of slow progress. Once he reached middle school when practice was not something his mother could enforce, daily practice time dwindled. In high school, despite never missing a lesson, not practicing became the norm. However, when his mother suggested that he quit since he was not practicing, he refused to quit.

When he entered medical school, one of his professors who loves piano music was an avid collector of different arrangements of music scores. In addition, one of his colleagues studied seriously as a professional musician.

In this musical environment, Yoichiro suddenly had a tremendous urge to play the piano. When people really want to play, even if they do not have a piano, they will find a way. He helped me realize that you can play with ease if you have a strong technical foundation.

The fourth performer is Reina. After she graduated from the music conservatory, she chose further studying. She is currently pursuing a masters degree. Her mother worked so very earnestly with her since she was a little girl.

The fifth player, Suguru, has a father who loved piano music so much that he decided that his son would study piano even before he was born. His father was the one who brought him to lessons and practiced with him every day. He was a very strict father fervently working with his son. After graduating from high school, Suguru went to Europe to study music and met a Polish

singer, whom he married, who will perform with him in this concert. They now reside in Switzerland and are very active performers.

The final performer, Seizo started his piano lessons at age 5 when his father was transferred to Matsumoto. Even before he started lessons with me, Seizo was interested in classical piano music. When he came home from kindergarten, he would listen to the family's recording of Chopin for hours, replaying it over and over all by himself. Because of this affinity for listening, he advanced very quickly. Even though he was inclined to listen on his own, I encouraged him to listen even more. He usually practiced three to four hours a day and 5 hours or more on Sundays. Recently I heard from his mother that there wasn't a single day that they did not practice what they were asked to do. I was so very deeply impressed.

Having seen these students throughout their development through middle school and high school and then into adulthood, I have observed that their journey has gradually resulted into a yearning to learn of their own volition, responding to unfolding

opportunities for remarkable endeavors.

Such is all true. However, I believe it is the foundation built between the ages of three or four until middle school that makes it possible for the glorious outcome: the ability to thrive in their chosen field of work.

Who made it possible to build such a foundation? Yes, the children themselves did the actual practice, but at age three and four if a parent is not there to practice with a child, regardless of how exceptional the child is, the child is not able to practice patiently with the necessary kind of good repetition.

The most important requisite of learning something physical is to practice every day, 365 days a year, without skipping a day. Any parent who can accomplish this feat is truly extraordinary.

The actual practice is not difficult. All you have to do is do repetitions of what the teacher assigns at lessons with patience and perseverance. This is easier said than done. I was not able to do this for my own children because of my busy schedule. Recently, I have had the opportunity to practice with my grandchildren. I am made deeply aware of how important and difficult a parent's job is. It is a totally different task than the teacher's. The teacher's job may be much easier.

With concentration, love and perseverance, long hours spent practicing patiently at home is quite a daunting job. Parents are able to endure such a task for many years only because they love their

children and look forward to reap the joys of bringing them up well.

Parents can endow such a wonderful gift to children. Accumulated practice at home is the gift of the foundation of life that cannot be found anywhere in the world or purchased with any amount of money.

Workshop Directors:

Those who attend Suzuki Piano Basics Workshops or 10-Piano Concerts, teachers and families, are required to be members of the Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation. If you are a workshop director, please collect membership dues in your list of tuition requirements. Teacher membership is \$40 annually (\$60 for Canadians), and family membership is \$25. Send new member information and dues to Linda Nakagawa, Treasurer.

Reflections on watching your children struggle...

By Sara Rance-Brady

I knew from the beginning that I wanted my children to study Suzuki piano. I wanted them to grow an appreciation for music but, also deeper than that, I had whole child development in mind.

Think about those awkward times at your child's piano lessons when, after several repeats with little progress made, you see her body language start to change, she's getting more resistant to the work she's being asked to do, and you know a meltdown is coming soon...

You want to intervene: either comfort her to let her know it will be okay, or use discipline by calling her out on how this behavior is uncooperative and disrespectful to the teacher.

But you resist, because you know allowing her to get to that uncomfortable place, and work through it, is crucial to her success.



Lillian, Lita and Sara Brady. Photo by Lillian Brady.

Working through that place of discomfort and tension without a parent's interference, allows her to develop a relationship of trust with her teacher where future risks can be taken. It's not a reflection on you that your child might start pounding the keys when being asked to curl her pinky. She'll figure out that acting defiantly doesn't mean she'll be allowed to quit, and that she'll be okay once she's survived the ordeal. No one is mad at her and she will be stronger for it. Next time, she'll be able to work a bit longer before she hits that stubborn wall of resistance and accomplish more in that zone of frustration.

She's learning that she can still be productive while frustrated. Being frustrated or tested doesn't mean you give up. She's beginning to understand that she can work through it. It might not be pretty or fun to watch, but she is in a safe place where she can work through a range of uncomfortable emotions, show her weaknesses, and know that it will still be okay.

Sara is a parent from the studio of Teri Paradero. Her daughters, Lillian and Lita have been studying Suzuki piano since 2011. They have learned to be able to work through their 'zone of frustration' and now are self-motivated to concentrate and work hard. She said it was fun reading her article out loud to her daughters.

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Membership Renewal:

Hopefully you have received an email reminder, in addition to reminders here in the newsletter, that your membership is about to lapse. Please send in your renewal forms ASAP to remain in our Directory.

Music and Class

By Karen Hagberg

From Matsumoto News, Vol.2, no.6, January 1990

Thirty years ago when I wrote this there was no way to know how much more relevant these observations are today. Upon re-reading I am stunned to observe that nothing ever changes. Let us

all hope that Suzuki Sensei was correct in his belief that humans evolve eventually to a higher plane of understanding and consciousness. KAH

Having been a student in the 1960's, I was aware of many of the world's problems. American young

people at that time felt a responsibility somehow to change many situations. The Vietnam War, racial discrimination, human poverty, and sexual inequality were the major issues, but there were many others—seemingly no end to trouble. Many of us felt compelled to devote much of our energy to political movements intended to improve the future.

In universities, socially “relevant” disciplines such as sociology, psychology and political science were very popular. It was considered almost immoral then to study irrelevant things such as literature, art, and, of course, music. As a music major, I had to cope with guilt: constantly to rationalize the value of sitting in a practice room while the boys of my generation were dying by the thousands in a senseless war, while people were starving, and while the unprivileged of the world were being forced to live miserable lives, devoid of any meaningful opportunity. After all, as the popular song “Which side are you on, Boy?” said, you were either working for solutions or were part of the problem.

So much of the “problem” seemed to originate with the unequal distribution of wealth. Consequently, the world of privilege, of rich people, was a particular target of scorn; and fine art and music were a part of that world.

In an attempt to eradicate symbols of privilege, communist countries during those years were officially dealing with the same issues. In the Soviet Union, the People’s Republic of China, and Cuba, works of art were destroyed, and books and music censored. In China, during the infamous “Cultural Revolution,” musicians’ instruments were confiscated and musicians were forbidden to practice. In some countries they even tried to produce new art music written collectively, by egalitarian “committees” of composers.

In the U.S. some performers gave recital in jeans and plaid shirts, sipping coffee between movements, in an attempt to bring serious music out of the realm of the upper class, concert-hall environment, to de-mystify the concert artist, to bring music to “the people.” Great orchestras began playing outdoors to casual audiences picnicking on the lawn. People with a social conscience disdained the high-society aspect of music and avoided it whenever possible, often turning their tastes to popular genres.

For myself, it was difficult to find meaning in the world of classical music in this environment. I, along with all my friends—even musician friends—was deeply involved in politics. We had a strong desire not to be like the Roman Emperor Nero who “fiddled while Rome burned.” For years after graduate school, I found myself devoting most of my time to political struggles of various kinds. I could not help but see classical music as a symbol of social strife. There was no way I could justify giving my life to it. The concert hall seemed like a musty museum with no relevance whatever.

My love of music however, my love of the piano in particular, always drew me back. This most recent time coincided with my meeting Kataoka Sensei who, to my surprise, not only defined good music as a high-class art, but seemed to need to make no excuses for this. An important aspect of her teaching, in fact, is that teachers must constantly

strive to refine our own tastes in all areas not just in music, and then to elevate the tastes of our students and their families as well. In a twist of reasoning which I found rather mind-boggling at first, Kataoka Sensei reiterated a basic tenet of the Suzuki Method, that by nurturing young people to appreciate highly-refined taste in all things we are promoting peace in the world. Seeing in her teaching the possibility of resolving what had been the greatest conflict in my life made me very excited about studying with her.

Kataoka Sensei teaches taste at every lesson and outside of lessons as well. She manages to change the way her students live, the way they look, the way they act. After beginning to study with her, they get better pianos, better recording equipment, more high-quality recordings. They attend more concerts. They wear better clothes and eat better food. Only in this way, she teaches, can young children be nurtured into the world of fine art, can they be taught to hear and produce subtleties of tone, can they learn to play the piano well.

What is it about this environment that is different from the world of excess, exploitation, and extravagance which I had always seen as the cause of so many social problems? How, in fact, could producing high-class sensibilities in children actually foster world peace? I have spent a

good deal of time pondering these issues.

Kataoka Sensei says that great music is a manifestation of God. To know great music is somehow to know God, or at least to know the extent of human imaginings of God. Many aestheticians over the centuries have expressed the same idea. In the literature of aesthetics, music, of all the arts, has been considered the highest art form because of its existence separate from “reality” and “utility.” It does not, as do painting and sculpture, draw on real life for subject matter. Nor, as in the case of architecture, does it perform any useful function. The subject of music seems somehow to be the human soul itself. Studying music at its finest level can be compared to practicing religion. Through it, we can catch a glimpse of pure truth, pure beauty. We can see deeply into ourselves, to the place of our highest potential, to our greatest dreams. Suzuki Sensei believes that people who can experience and understand these things are people who do not wage war—that they, on the contrary are a force of peace in the world.

The fine art of music exists, however in a very rarified environment. Now we have excellent recording equipment, but just a hundred years ago only a select few people were able to experience serious art music. It existed only in great cathedrals and in very wealthy secular edifices. I often think about how miraculous it must have been to hear a Beethoven Symphony, for example, or a Palestrina Mass only once in one’s lifetime. What events these times must have been.

In a sense we are living in a more fortunate time, when great music is available to more people. It still is the product of, and exists in, the realm of modern-day privilege in which the basic needs of people are met and, after that, in which people can take time to develop appreciation and to refine their senses. Wealth produces the *possibility* of such an environment, but it certainly does not, in itself,

ensure that this environment will exist. In fact, wealthy environments are often devoid of good taste. Money is, unfortunately more often than not, wasted on things of little or no value. In that case, money just produces human excess and detracts from, rather than enhances, the goodness and beauty in the world. Possibly great art and great music, as fortunate by-products of upper-class society, serve to temper the waste and excess that too much money can bring. For, aside from having produced great art, an overabundance of wealth in itself has contributed little to our world. Nothing but art survives the most opulent cultures.

Great music still exists in the realm of privilege. To pursue a study of it or to gain an appreciation of it one's senses must be constantly further refined in an environment specially created for that purpose. Fortunately, these days this is possible even on a middle-class budget. It is just a question of how to choose values. Do we raise children, now that we have this choice, on television and video games or on Bach and Mozart? In

the middle-class world we are now all faced with this decision. Many of us sense the truth of Suzuki Sensei's belief that our future is safer in the hands of children who know Bach and Mozart.



Matsumoto News Republication: From September 1988 through January 1992, Karen Hagberg lived and studied in Matsumoto with Dr. Haruko Kataoka, the co-Founder of the Suzuki Piano Method and the founder of the Suzuki Piano Basics Method. During that time she published a newsletter with nine issues annually that was distributed to Suzuki piano teachers in North America and Europe. In addition to news of upcoming workshops and multi-piano concerts, each issue contained an article intended to share what it was like as a foreigner to live in Japan and to study with Dr. Kataoka and Dr. Suzuki.

Nearly twenty years have elapsed since the first issue of Matsumoto News: an entire generation. By popular demand we are re-publishing the articles here. They have been edited from the original, but they remain under copyright and may not be reproduced without written permission from the author.

Piano Basics Foundation Upcoming Workshops/Events

July 20-24, 2020

St. Louis, Missouri

Suzuki Piano Basics Teacher Research Workshop
Featuring Bruce Anderson and Rae Kate Shen
Contact: Patty Eversole 314-496-3520
paeversole@yahoo.com
<http://stlsuzukipiano.tripod.com>

April 25, 2021

Matsumoto, Japan 10-Piano Concert*

Visiting student enrollment deadline: 8/30/2020
Contact Karen Hagberg: 585-978-0600
khagberg1943@gmail.com

August 2021

NOTE: There will be no August workshop in the U.S. next year with the Japanese teachers because of travel difficulties caused by the Tokyo Olympics. Plan on a February 2021 workshop, place TBD!

*Teacher members of Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation are welcome to travel to Matsumoto to observe two weeks of rehearsals (which are very instructional group lessons). The American group will leave on April 8 and return on April 26. Scholarship assistance is available for teachers. Foreign students may apply to participate in the concert if their teacher has already attended as an observer and if the student has had at least one lesson with the Japanese teachers. Students who have not yet had a lesson **MUST** plan to attend the workshop in February 2021. Contact Karen Hagberg for further information.

The events listed above are for the information of Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation members and others. Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation does not endorse, sanction, or sponsor events.

To add or change items on this list and on the Suzuki Piano Basics website, contact
Karen Hagberg (khagberg1943@gmail.com, 585-978-0600).